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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the rise of "PRolicy" (Public Relations public policy) by examining the first Reagan Administration and its use of media manipulation. The paper also explores how PRolicy influences educational policy. It draws on a two-pronged methodological approach that involved media analysis and historical policy analysis with a focus on how elected officials employ symbolic messages to shape educational policy. The paper analyzes the role of agenda-setting in PRolicy and the manipulation of American political, cultural, and religious symbols as a means of generating support for their policy proposals. It details how PRolicy has been part of the American presidency since the Nixon era and how Reagan used PRolicy as a central feature of policy formation, particularly his administration's use of PRolicy to reform education. Reagan's championing of school prayer, his efforts to dismantle the Department of Education, and the publication of "A Nation at Risk" all served to advance his agenda. The paper outlines how the Reagan Administration took "A Nation at Risk," a damaging critique of Reagan's educational policy, and turned it into a public-relations tour for the president. It concludes with a general discussion of PRolicy and implications for educational policy researchers, teachers, and administrators. Contains 48 references. (RJM)

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CROSSING BORDERS IN A MEDIA DRIVEN AGE: THE RISE OF PROLICY

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CROSSING BORDERS IN A MEDIA DRIVEN AGE: THE RISE OF PROLICY

> We are trying to mold public opinion by marketing strategies.– Reagan Administration Advisor Bill Henkel (Smith, 1988, p. 418)

It has become quite the academic vogue to examine the boundaries which divide individuals along lines of race, ethnicity, class, gender, religion and sexual orientation. This exploration is done in hopes of improving educational and administrative practices to facilitate better outcomes for those students who have been deemed as "other." We are now supposed to "teach to transgress" (hooks, 1994) and "cross borders" (Giroux, 1992) in the quest of ensuring public education might become a liberating tonic for historically disenfranchised groups (Lugg, 1997).

Yet, for all of the flurry of activity by academics and educators, US policy makers are loathe to make similar explorations. Contemporary educational policy agendas and proposals have the appearance of being raceless, neutered, and suitably pre-packaged for the evening news. Additionally, policy makers and policy "wonks" (i.e. think-tankers) appear on various news and "info"tainment shows, touting sound-bite proposals that are easily digested by the viewing public. Any sophisticated discussion of the tacitly acknowledged "borders" is avoided in the hopes of warding off public policy indigestion. *Employing the methodologies of media analysis and historical policy analysis* , this paper seeks to analyze the rise of PRolicy (or Public Relations public policy–Lugg, 1996), by examining the first Reagan administration and its use of media manipulation to shape public perceptions of its policy agendas. The paper also explores how PRolicy shapes both educational policy and strengthens these borders. It concludes with a general discussion of PRolicy and implications for educational policy researchers, teachers and administrators.

Methodological and Analytical Considerations

This paper employed a two pronged methodological approach since the author was concerned with how leaders use the media to enhance their policy and political agendas. The first prong involved media analysis with a particular focus upon how elected officials (in this case, President Ronald Reagan and his first administration) employed symbolic messages, (which were transmitted through news accounts, question and answer sessions with reporters and others, and press releases), to shape educational policy. The author drew heavily upon the works of Murray Edelman (1988; 1993), and perhaps his best known student, Kathleen Hall Jamieson (1997; 1992; 1988), in assessing how leaders use and manipulate political communication to enhance both their power and their policy agendas.

The second methodological prong involved historical policy analysis (Warren, 1983; Silver, 1990; Lugg, 1996). Historical policy analysis involves an "eclectic search" for a given society's power variables (political, economic, cultural, and symbolic), to see if and how they are made manifest in policy (Warren, 1983). It also is concerned with the ever-shifting social and political contexts in which these power variables are employed. Historical policy analysis seeks to contextualize the process of policy making (Lugg, 1996). Given the nature of the project, it was important to determine what symbolic messages were actually translated into policy, and which were not. In both instances, the author drew upon both primary and secondary sources, such as the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, assorted Reagan-era memoirs, journalistic accounts and academic analyses, in determining the direction of federal policy and PRolicy .

PRolicy and Agenda Setting

Thanks to the contemporary multi-media explosion, political leaders and the various participants have become sophisticated in their manipulation of American political, cultural and religious symbols as a means of generating support for their policy proposals.

Additionally, the influence of public relations techniques upon the American political sphere should not be underestimated (see Hertsgaard, 1987). Both public relations and politics involve the manipulation of symbolism which can yield long-term gains in power, for both individuals and like-minded groups (Edelman, 1985).

PRolicy (or Public Relations public policy) is one form of this manipulation. Derived from the word PRolitics–public relations politics–(see Block, 1974), PRolicy can be viewed as "exhortations from the bully pulpit" (Lugg, 1996, p. 27). Unlike policy, which involves numerous elected and unelected public officials coming to consensus regarding the direction of public policy, PRolicy is generated by unelected media specialists who are well versed in the techniques of symbolic manipulation. Constant polling, the use of focus groups, and the tailoring of strategic sound bites for reporters' daily consumption (or "today's message," see Hertsgaard, 1987) are but a few examples of PRolicy techniques employed by politicians and their handlers (Jamieson & Campbell, 1997; Jamieson, 1992; Edelman, 1988).

PRolicy can be a particularly effective means of seducing the fourth estate. News organizations are forced to compete for sellable stories, looking for access to newsmakers, whether they be political, social, economic or cultural leaders. Additionally, a major twentieth century innovation regarding political control has been that of news management by political elites. "News" in the information age is a hot commodity, and the American news media is a for-profit enterprise, whether the organization is ABC or PBS (Lugg, 1996). Journalists must cultivate good working relationships with various political officials in order to maintain their competitive edge. As Douglas Kellner observed:

> inside government sources are essential to a reporter's career, and ... the media must cultivate their sources by releasing stories and information that government officials want released while holding back information that might prove embarrassing to their sources. (1990, p. 106)

Walter Karp noted that "the irony of source journalism [is] that the most esteemed journalists are actually the most servile. For it is by making themselves useful to the

powerful that they gain access to their 'best' sources" (Karp, 1989, p. 62). Being first in breaking the news (especially *national* news) is far more important to the corporate bottom line than being accurate (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997).

Such a commodification of the news can provide elected politicians with enormous power in shaping policy agendas and maintaining political control (Kellner, 1990). The incessant demand for political news creates a situation ripe for manipulation and distortion, whether the medium is print, radio, or television (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). This sophisticated mixture of symbolic manipulation and marketing "pitch" can cause better informed, more politically aware citizens to succumb to the call of PRolicy. The dependency of the media upon political elites for their corporate bottom line also provides political elites with enormous power. As political scientist W. Lance Bennett discovered:

> more informed members of opinion samples tend to be more responsive to cueing from political elites because those elites are represented in the media. It appears that, far from creating more sophistication and independence of mind, higher levels of information lead to greater receptivity to elite propaganda. (Bennett, 1993, p. 107)

It is more important that news organizations dispense their product with regularity, regardless of actual content or quality, than to have nothing (or very little) to proffer to the public (Jamieson & Campbell, 1997).

The power of political elites (including individuals at various levels of government) to shape voters' preferences has also received an enormous boost with the emergence of public policy think-tanks. Think-tanks are privately funded and ostensibly non-partisan organizations engaged in public policy research. Like many academics involved in the policy arena, think-tank fellows are committed to shaping both the debate and the enactment of specific public policies (Lindblom & Woodhouse, 1993, pp. 126 - 138). Many lay claim to the mantle of objectivity in their social science research, or as journalist William Greider has described, they have the "the ostensible rationality of disinterested statistics and abstract

argumentation" (1992, p. 300). To the viewing public, they give off more than a whiff of the academy and a number of the fellows hold Ph.D.s.

But unlike more academically oriented policy researchers, think-tankers employ a high degree of easy symbolism to push their agendas. In others words, such organizations and their constituent members favor PRolicy over policy. They are *mis*educative sites masquerading as educational institutions. Soundbites are flung with a disarming ease, which can then be injected into actual policy debates. For example, Heritage Foundation analyst Robert Rector was often quoted in 1995, after he asserted welfare policy should adhere to Saint Paul's injunction "Those who shall not work, shall not eat." This tactic is highly appealing to media organizations whose corporate bottom line depends upon keeping the political spectacle churning (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). As one former editor at the *Washington Post*, David Ignatius, observed:

> It often seems that these large and well-endowed organizations exist for the sole purpose of providing articles for the opinion sections and op-ed pages.
>
> I will confess here to a dangerous vice.... I like think tanks, and mainly for one simple reason: their members know how to play the game, that is, the know how to be provocative, they can write quickly under deadline pressure and they don't mind being heavily edited. (in Greider, 1992, p. 300)

Additionally, most think-tankers have been very good in trotting out their PRolicy proposals to various "talking-head" television news shows (Lugg, 1996, p. 28).

While think tanks claim a degree of non-partisanship (to maintain their federal tax-exempt status), most have a pronounced ideological agenda, with a few holding a very cozy relationship to the Republican Party (see Meese, 1992). Additionally, some have served as employment agencies for deposed politicians of dubious scholarly merit (Edwin Meese decamped to Heritage; Dan Quayle went to Hudson). By employing displaced politicians of ideological notoriety, each think-tank gained further clout in the political spectacle and in managing the news.

With the rise of PRolicy, ostensibly educative sites such as television news and public policy research are quickly transformed into spectacular *mis*educative presentations of political options (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). The mass media presentation *trains*, and more importantly, it can dazzle millions of viewing Americans, while reinforcing dearly held myths and reassuring a worried populace (Jamieson, 1992). Well-designed PRolicy can gloss over existing political, social and economic problems or shift the television klieg lights to focus the public's attention elsewhere. This paper now turns to one US President, Ronald Reagan and how he employed educational PRolicy to reshape policy options while enhancing his overall political positions.

PRolicy and Ronald Reagan

PRolicy has been part of the American presidency since at least the Nixon–era (Lugg, 1996). Richard Nixon became the first PResident, when he hired Bob Haldeman, an old PR man, as his chief of staff (Block, 1974). Haldeman was very aware of the power of mass-marketing. What could be used to sell "Buicks" could be employed to sell presidents. While Nixon was legendary in his mistrust of the media (Haldeman, 1994), he was well aware of its power in shaping public perceptions, particularly television. And Nixon had had some early media success when he salvaged his political career with the televised "Checkers speech" in 1956 (Jamieson, 1992).

With the election of Ronald Wilson Reagan to the presidency in 1980, PRolicy underwent both a massive refinement and expansion. It became a central feature of policy formation within the Reagan White House. The upper administration was organized into what became known as "The Troika" (Meese, 1992; Reagan, 1989; Speakes, 1988; Cannon, 1991). James A. Baker III, a moderate republican, friend of Vice-President Bush and Washington insider, was made Chief of Staff. Edwin Meese, III, a long-time aide and confident to Reagan was made Counselor to the President. The final member was Michael

Deaver, another long-time Reagan aide and close confidant of both Ronald and Nancy Reagan.

While Baker and Meese concentrated on policy making, Deaver's sole task was that of PRolicy. Deaver was considered to be a public relations genius (Schieffer & Gates, 1989; Reagan, 1989; Cannon, 1991), he had and earned the moniker "the vicar of the visuals" (Smith, 1988, p. 414). Deaver's strength was that he knew how to "stage" Reagan – what lighting, symbols and settings to use – to ensure Ronald Reagan and his messages would be heard, and, more importantly, felt. While Deaver had very little interest in actual policy making (Stockman, 1986, p. 45), he played a crucial role as White House Deputy Chief of Staff. It was paramount that both Ronald and Nancy Reagan were always presented in the best political light. It was Deaver's responsibility to market the administration's ideas to the American public, to make the more controversial conservative policy proposals appealing to a television audience.

Ronald Reagan also contributed to the art of PRolicy in two key ways. First, his prior experiences as an actor and General Electric "pitchman" were invaluable. Unlike other politicians of his generation, Reagan was meticulously schooled in the new entertainment and news medium, television. Few politicians were so thoroughly well-versed in the techniques of PR. Nor did they easily adapt to, much less enjoy, the bright glare of the television studio lights. Reagan and his political handlers deliberately mentioned his movie and television experiences when on the campaign stump. Employing a good measure of self deprecating humor, this was done to defuse the charge that Reagan "was only an actor." Reagan beat his political opponents to the rhetorical punch by mocking his own background. For example, during his first gubernatorial campaign he was asked what sort of governor he would make Reagan replied, "I don't know, I've never played a governor" (Cannon, 1991, p. 37).

However, this statement is indicative of the second way in which Reagan contributed to PRolicy. Unlike his presidential predecessor Jimmy Carter, Reagan was largely disinterested in the day-to-day details of governing (Anderson, 1990). As Don Regan, who served first as Treasury Secretary and then later as Chief of State, recalled:

> In the four years that I served as Secretary of the Treasury I never saw President Reagan alone and never discussed economic philosophy or fiscal or monetary policy with him one-on-one. From first day to last at Treasury, I was flying by the seat of my pants. The President never told me what he believed or what he wanted to accomplish in the field of economics. I had to figure these things out like any other American, by studying his speeches and reading the newspapers.
>
> The President seemed to believe that his public statements were all the guidance his private advisers required. Ronald Reagan's campaign promises *were* his policy. (emphasis in the original, (1988, pp. 42-44)

This presidential disinterest combined with Reagan's own zest for hyperbole[1] could lead to manipulation of both Reagan and the administration's policy agendas. According to journalist Lou Cannon:

> Reagan was apt to accept as valid any story, statistic or policy recommendation that squared with his prejudices. He was often an easy mark for subordinates trying to promote their own agendas, especially when the agendas were disguised in Reaganesque phrases. (1991, p. 181)

Such free-wheeling embellishment by Reagan coupled with manipulated scripting led to a number of surrealistic policy moments, particularly regarding public education. This discussion now turns to an exploration of the first Reagan administration's educational agenda.

The Agenda for Education

During the 1980 presidential campaign, Ronald Reagan promised a major shift in federal educational policy if elected. First and foremost, the newly created Department of Education would be shut down. Rooted in conservative ideology, Reagan's reasons for

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[1]One presidential scholar observed, "Ronald Reagan is the first modern President whose contempt for the facts is treated as a charming idiosyncrasy." Attributed to James David Barber (Hertsgaard, 1988, p. 149)

closing ED included that it was an unnecessary public expense and that the federal government was intruding in to matters that were better left to the states (Reagan, 1990). Second, Reagan had long extolled the virtues of organized prayer in public schools and promised that it would return during his administration. Third, Reagan was a fierce opponent of busing for school desegregation, and he repeatedly called mandatory busing plans "forced busing." And finally, Reagan endorsed a plank in the Republican party platform which stated "we will halt the unconstitutional regulatory vendetta launched by Mr. Carter's IRS commissioner against independent schools" (Barrett, 1983, p. 418; Cannon, 1991, p. 521).[2]

While the administration had no success in shutting down ED,[3] thanks to strong bi-partisan Congressional support in both houses, the administration greatly retrenched and ideologically reshaped the Department of Education (Lugg, 1996). By the conclusion of 1982, ED had suffered massive staff cuts, losing 23% of its employees (Lewis, 1983), more than any other cabinet agency. Work assignments were made so as to destroy cohesiveness. In once instance staff personnel were in one building, and the administrator was in another, 12 miles away (Lewis, 1983). Additionally ED's magazine, American Education, underwent a sweeping editorial change, with think-tankers Dennis Doyle and Onalee McGraw supervising the magazine's content (Lugg, 1996).

The Reagan administration was also thwarted by Congress in 1982, 1983, and again 1984 in it's attempt to amend the US constitution regarding school prayer. During the 1980 campaign, Reagan had helped to solidify the support of the New Christian Right with

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[2]The latter three policy emphases were tied to an electoral strategy known as the "Southern Strategy." As devised by Kevin Phillips in 1968, the national Republican party could engage in politics and policies that appealed to white conservatives (Phillips, 1969, pp. 31, 37, 468). "Reagan administration officials knew they could 'write off the black vote' and win; and so they did" (Lugg, 1996, p. 201).

[3]The administration was fairly sanguine about its political chances, and assigned the hapless secretary of education, Terrel Bell, the task of taking the proposal for ED's demise up to the hill. Bell was not particularly well-respected by other Reagan-era officials (Meese, 1992; Stockman, 1986), and his enthusiasm for ED made him ideologically suspect. When the proposal was quickly shot down, the administration easily distanced itself from

his support of school prayer (among other hot button issues--see Lugg, 1996). As President, Reagan repeatedly lamented the removal of state-sponsored prayer from the public schools, claiming that the US Supreme Court had erred. As he stated in 1981

> I happen to believe that the court ruled wrongly with regard to prayer in the schools for example. The first amendment doesn't say anything about that. The first amendment says that Congress shall do nothing to abridge the practice of religion or create a religion. And Yet, we're still a country where it says "In God We Trust" on our coins and over the doors of the Supreme Court. Wasn't this a case, maybe of the court going beyond what the Constitution actually says. (Reagan, 1981, p. 1162)

By 1984, the message was refined to portray school prayer as the educational panacea. During the Republican Convention, Reagan declared:

> If our opponents were as vigorous in supporting our voluntary prayer amendment as they are in raising taxes, maybe we could get the Lord back in the schoolrooms and drugs and violence out. (Reagan, 1984, p. 1171)

But for all of the rhetorical support and occasional attempted "end runs" around various US Supreme Court decisions,[4] the administration lacked the Congressional votes to pass any of its prayer proposals.

The most striking change in federal education policy was the Reagan administration's activist civil rights agenda, albeit in the other direction. As both a candidate and president, Reagan repeatedly spoke out against the ills of "forced" busing to alleviate public school segregation, even in the face of contradictory evidence (Orfield & Ashkinaze, 1991; Shull, 1993). He advocated allowing communities to decide for themselves whether they wished to bus or not (Reagan, 1982). Additionally, the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, under the direction of William Bradford Reynolds, moved away from

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Bell. As Bell bitterly recalled "It was a bastard child, and I was the father. The best thing to do was establish as much distance from both as possible" (Bell, 1988, p. 97).

[4]In 1984, the White House Office of Policy Information released an eight-page pamphlet containing strategies to facilitate prayer in public schools. "A teacher could ask as student to volunteer to offer the prayer for the day, making sure to rotate the assignment each day to a differing student. Schools could also ask for student volunteers to offer a prayer over the school's P.A. system. Younger students would be asked well in advance so they would have time to discuss with their parents what sort of prayer to offer. Those students who objected to prayer would be allowed to leave the room" (Lugg, 1996, p. 161). Such strategies were an invitation to a lawsuit.

enforcing the *Brown* decision and its progeny, and declared separate public schools to be permissible as long as they produced equal educational outcomes (Caldwell & White, 1981).[5] In November 1981, Reynolds stated "We are not going to compel children who don't choose to have integrated education to have one" (White & Caldwell, 1981, p. 9), not a particularly ringing endorsement of desegregation. There is also evidence that the Department of Justice (or more accurately, Reynolds) interfered with the NAACP in Charleston, SC, in bringing a desegregation suit. Regarding the situation in Charleston, Reynolds allegedly told his staff, "Those bastards just want to bring in the busing issue.... They're probably entitled to intervene, but let's make them jump through every hoop" (Schwartz, 1988, pp. 183-184).

A corollary to the retreat in civil rights enforcement was the Reagan administration's support school choice via tuition tax credits and tax exemptions. Reagan frequently trumpeted the merits of private primary and secondary schooling while lambasting the public schools. But his administration went further than mere rhetoric. The embrace of tax exemptions for racially discriminatory schools (i.e. *Bob Jones and the Goldsboro Christian Schools*) was a striking departure in federal policy,[6] was tied to the electoral strategy or "Southern Strategy," of courting conservative white votes while "writing off the black vote" (Phillips, 1969; Lugg, 1996). Unlike his predecessors, Reagan tightly linked federal education policy with racial politics.[7] The administration may not have been able to eliminate ED or get Congress to agree to school prayer, tax credits or vouchers, but through a serious of policy decisions and frequent PRolicy pronouncements, it did begin to

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[5]As one school administrator caustically observed at the time, "It sure sounds like he is talking about 'separate but equal'" (Caldwell & White, 1981, p. 1).

[6]While conservative activists blamed the Carter administration for allegedly interfering in the educational policy decisions of private religious schools, the precedent had been set by that great civil libertarian, Richard M. Nixon (Lugg, 1996).

[7]This is not to imply that other presidents did not. There is ample evidence that earlier presidents had linked federal education policy to racial politics (Eisenhower, Johnson, and Nixon). However, Reagan and his advisors were particularly enthusiastic in their efforts, as Terrel Bell relates.

shift the focus away from equity. This shift was also facilitated by the release of the report "A Nation at Risk."

The NCEE and "A Nation at Risk"

Given the pronounced ideological agenda of the Reagan administration, it is not surprising that a number his advisors opposed the formation of a commission to examine public education and make recommendations (Toch, 1991; Bell, 1988). Terrel Bell had originally wished the commission to be a *presidential* commission, but that idea had no support within administration circles (Toch, 1991; Bell, 1988; Lugg, 1996). Instead, a National Commission on Excellence in Education was chartered in August 1981, to examine the condition of US public education and make recommendations. "Bell succeeded in establishing the commission and he was politically astute enough to steer it clear of ideologically impure issues, those of funding and access" (Lugg, 1996, p. 80). The commission had a fairly narrow mission and was to focus upon "standards, rigor, and excellence" (Wehrwein, 1981, p. 4).

During 1981, 1982 and the early portion of 1983, the NCEE quietly went about its task, gathering data and compiling a report. The final report had been scheduled for a March 1983 release, but the commission delayed for a month, while members negotiated to make the findings unanimous. The month delay allowed the administration to gather polling data regarding the country's perception of Reagan and public education. The findings were disappointing. "In mid-March, Wirthlin's polls had shown the public disapproved of Reagan's handling of education by 48-42 percent. The education report was going to make Reagan look worse–unless he rapidly put his spin of the report" (Smith, 1988, pp. 416-417).

The release of "A Nation at Risk," was a stunning rebuke to the administration's policy initiatives. The NCEE determined that an inadequate public education system was

placing the nation at risk, both economically and militarily. Coming on the heels of one of the worst recessions since the great depression, the report was political dynamite.

> We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. (1983, p. 5)

The report's recommendations included a call for continued federal involvement in education, particularly in "areas that States and localities alone are unlikely to be able to meet" (1983, p. 32).[8] The report contained no mention of school prayer, tuition tax credits or vouchers, all policy ideas which had been loudly trumpeted by the Reagan administration.

Reagan's own remarks at the ceremony were remarkable in that they were strikingly disconnected from the actual contents of the report.

> Your call for an end to Federal intrusion is consistent with out task of redefining the Federal role in education. I believe that parents, not Government, have the primary responsibility for the education of their children. Parental authority is not a right conveyed by the state; rather parents delegate to their elected school board representatives and State legislators the responsibility for their children's schooling.
>
> So, we'll continue to work in the months ahead for passage of tuition tax credits, vouchers, educational savings accounts, voluntary school prayer, and abolishing the Department of Education. (Reagan, 1983, p. 594)

Reagan admitted the next day that he hadn't bothered to read it before the ceremony (Reagan, 1983, p. 596).[9]

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[8] "...protecting constitutional and civil rights for students and school personnel; collecting data, statistics, and information about education generally; supporting curriculum improvement and research on teaching, learning and the management of schools; supporting teaching training in areas of critical shortage or key national needs; and providing student financial assistance and research and graduate training" (1983, pp. 32-33).

[9] The author has yet to find evidence that President Reagan ever read the report. However, there is compelling evidence that he did not (Lugg, 1996). Reagan's memoir contains only five mentions of the federal role in public education, and these are all in the negative. There is no mention of "A Nation at Risk" or the tour. According to Thomas Toch, "Reagan's speech was denounced by members of the national commission. 'We've been had,' said Gerald Holton in a postceremony interview with the New York Times" (Toch, 1991, p. 24).

With the release of "A Nation at Risk," the Reagan administration faced an enormous public relations problem and a policy embarrassment. None of it's pet proposals were reflected in the document, and the report's recommendation for a credible federal role in education belied the administration's rhetoric to the contrary.

In May, the Reagan administration was handed a another PR fiasco when the Supreme Court, in an 8 to 1 decision, ruled in *Bob Jones University and the Goldsboro Christian Schools v. United States*, that the IRS had the power to deny federal tax-exemptions to private schools that discriminated upon the basis of race. Bob Jones University had a ban on inter-racial dating and marriage, and the Goldsboro Christian Schools, founded by Bob Jones alumni, refused to admit African-American students. Originally a Carter-era suit, the Reagan administration ordered the Justice Department to switch sides in the case in 1981, on the grounds that the IRS was intruding into the matters of private groups.[10] The administration's highly controversial action[11] left the IRS without official counsel, an unprecedented dilemma for a federal agency. Nevertheless, the court in May of 1983 rejected William Bradford Reynolds' argument, stating "It would be wholly incompatible with the concepts underlying tax exemption to grant the benefit of tax exempt status to racially discriminatory educational entities" (White, 1983, p. 10).[12] The Supreme

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[10]The order came directly from Ronald Reagan, who was honoring a request from then Representative Trent Lott from Mississippi (Lugg, 1996). At the time, Congressmen Lott had a sizable "segregation academy" constituency. "...by 1980, almost half of private school enrollment in Mississippi was church related. And as recent as 1989, less than one-half of one percent of Mississippi private school students were black." (Howard, 1992, pp. 10-11).

[11]Over 100 of the 176 career lawyers at the Department of Justice's Civil Rights division signed a memo to William Bradford Reynolds, declaring the switch in policy violated existing federal civil rights laws. They were promptly informed by a department spokesman that they could quit (Dugger, 1983, p. 214).

[12]The lone dissent was from Justice Rehnquist, not known for his enthusiasm for civil rights. According to Herman Schawartz, "The most notorious even of Rehnquist's clerkship was his memorandum to [Justice] Jackson titled 'A Random Thought on the Segregation Cases,' initialed 'WHR,' in which he argued that the separate but equal doctrine of Plessy v. Ferguson 'was right and should be reaffirmed." When the memo came to light in his 1971 confirmation hearing, Rehnquist tried to deflect the criticism by saying 'the memorandum was prepared by me at Justice Jackson's request...as a rough draft of a statement of his views [for presentation at the justices' conference]...rather than as statement of my views.' Both Elsie Douglas, Jackson's secretary for many years and scholars like Jackson's biographer Dennis Hutchinson and Richard Kluger have called Rehnquist's account 'absurd' (Schwartz, 1988, p. 113).

Court's decision in *Bob Jones* was yet another setback for the administration's PR machine. For the administration, the political pressure to do *something* was becoming unbearable.

Co-optation

Mike Deaver set about to remedy the public's image of Ronald Reagan and public education. He scheduled an elaborate presidential PR tour that would demonstrate Reagan's commitment to public education and also relieve some of the political pressure that the administration was under. Using a combination of administration officials and local political celebrities, the "A Nation at Risk" tour was to be an unprecedented show of presidential concern regarding the condition public education.

In June of 1983, the President, Secretary Bell, Jim Baker and Mike Deaver traveled across to the country to tout "A Nation at Risk." Reagan made numerous speeches regarding public education and "excellence," all which tended to skirt the actual content of the report and the administration's ongoing political woes in civil rights enforcement (Lugg, 1996). During the tour, Reagan also participated in "Question and Answer" sessions where he would depart from the "excellence" script. He would generally tout the virtues of school prayer and would on occasion, lash out at the NEA (Lugg, 1996, p. 147). The "Q&A" sessions were somewhat perilous for Reagan as he tended to focus solely on his pet policy proposals, shored up with a suitable homey anecdote. On the rare occasion when Reagan was pressed for specifics regarding educational policy and the report, he would defer, albeit gracefully, to Secretary Bell. And in one instance, when queried regarding his administration's policies in civil rights enforcement and public education, he lied (Lugg, 1996, p. 146).[13]

[13]Reagan stated on June 29, 1983, that "As a matter of fact, our Justice Department right now is engaged in more investigations of suspected discrimination in school districts than, I believe, any of the past several administrations have been" (Reagan, 1983a, p. 956). However, Reagan was counting the numerous investigations begun during the Carter administration. Discounting those, the number had been slashed. (Edel, 1992, p. 86).

Some within the educational community grumbled about the administration's lack of policy substance. As Anne Lewis of the *Phi Delta Kappan* noted in September 1983: "On the topic of improving education, at least, Reagan seems to turn the process around, using the issues in education as a vehicle for his stage presentation. The show becomes the substance" (Lewis, 1983, p. 3).

Lewis's observation was accurate. For the administration, the "A Nation at Risk" PRolicy tour was about selling Ronald Reagan. The tour's central concept was "Ronald Reagan cared about public schools" (Smith, 1988, p. 416). It never intended to ignite an educational reform movement. By hitting the road in June, typically a slow news month, targeting local television markets of major metropolitan areas (the administration was not going to talk to the national press), and by repeating the same scripted message again and again and again (educational excellence), the "A Nation at Risk" tour became a dry run for the 1984 presidential campaign (Cannon, 1991, p. 535).[14] As Mike Deaver later explained to journalist Mark Hertsgaard:

> We were playing to local markets. We plotted...[what were] key political states for us with major media markets: Atlanta, Dallas, Los Angeles, Chicago, St. Louis, Boston. You'd have two days of stories before the President arrived, about the security and logistics and all that, then they'd cover the actual day of the President's visit. And then many times we'd give the local anchor guy a half-hour interview, which they'd often run five nights in a row, five minutes each night on the local news. And of course with the local anchor, you had a much stronger bargaining position to tell him, "You can ask questions about these topics and nothing else," because for them to have a chance to interview the President was a very big deal. A lot of times their network White House correspondent might tell the anchor to ask [Reagan] such and such, which was the question they needed for their story that night, but that's part of the game. So he got that one shot, but we got four nights on the local news with something positive to us in a major media market. (Hertsgaard, 1988, pp. 49 - 50)

By the fall of 1983, the tour and PR campaign were over. The administration shifted its media focus away from "A Nation at Risk," and settled for issuing its standard

[14]This is not as odd as it appears. Close aides, advisors and Nancy Reagan were all concerned about Reagan's health should he run for re-election. The "A Nation at Risk" tour, structured around day-trips was a good test of Presidential endurance. Much of the 1984 campaign was based upon Presidential day trips.

educational PRolicy, school prayer, tuition tax credits and vouchers, while continuing its counter-revolution in civil rights enforcement (Lugg, 1996). Reagan would occasionally mention "A Nation at Risk" and educational excellence when it was politically advantageous to do so, such as late in the 1984 presidential campaign, but triggering an educational reform movement was never the Reagan administration's intent. Instead it wished to bolster political support for its questionable policy initiatives through the use of PRolicy. And through the use of effective PRolicy, the unintentional reform movement would center around academic excellence, not educational equity.

Discussion

The use of media driven PRolicy in educational policy formation has enormous implications for educators and academics. In a media driven age, it is the politicians, media specialists, and think-tankers who have the public's attention, not academic researchers or educators. While educators and academics are schooled in the arcane complexities of educational writing and discourse, they/we are not regularly writing ad copy nor staging "events" for the nightly television news. For the most part, they/we converse in a language that is simply quite alien to the majority of the population.[15]

This is particularly worrisome when discussion focuses upon issues of the educationally "other" and the role of academe. The language can be impossibly dense (Ettinger, 1994).

> The dominant discourses of modernity have rarely been able to address race and ethnicity as an ethical, political, and cultural marker in order to understand or self-consciously examine the notions of justice inscribed in the modernist belief in change and the progressive unfolding of history. In fact, race and ethnicity have been generally reduced to a discourse of the Other, a discourse that, regardless of its emancipatory or reactionary intent, often essentialized and reproduced the distance between the centers and margins of power. (Giroux, 1992, p. 113)

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[15]A notable exception is Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Dean of the Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania, who frequently appears on television news shows as election day draws nigh.

Perhaps, but such stilted rhetoric is sure to be ignored by the media, and in turn, by the general public and most policy makers.[16]

Unlike academics, politicians and their handlers need snappy soundbites and telegenic events to capture the media spotlight and maintain their presence in, if not control of, the political spectacle (Edelman, 1988). As researcher Majorie Randon Hershey found:

> With large numbers of citizens' attention held fast by the spectacle, more narrow interests can dominate policymaking. The status quo can be maintained. The process of political symbolism, then, both preserves and legitimizes the existing allocation of values in the society. (Hershey, 1993, p. 124)

Controversial and complex issues involving educational equity (and border crossing) can be easily skirted with a well-designed PRolicy campaign. Academics, in large part to their/our specialized professional language, are irrelevant. Kathleen Hall Jamieson's and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's table neatly displays the dilemma (1997, p. 133).

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[16]This is not a new dilemma confronting educational theorists. William James allegedly told John Dewey that "You not only write damnably, you write God-damnably!" Many thanks to Professor Henry C. Johnson, Jr., for sharing this tale.

A Checklist for Creating Newsworthy Statements Likely to Be Covered and Published

To Be	*Or .....Not to Be*
A single coherent statement	A rambling statement
clearly summarizing the issue	skirting the issue
in jargon-free English	in gobbledygook,
written to be understood on	written to be figured out
first hearing or reading,	by a cryptographer
which can be delivered	which could not be delivered
clearly and dramatically	effectively by Laurence Oliver
in less than 14 seconds	in less than 35 minutes
requiring no additional	requiring at least a paragraph of
information	clarification
available before deadline	available at midnight
at a convenient place for newsgatherers	at the North Pole
delivered in a symbolic	delivered in a setting with no
setting	apparent relationship to the
	statement
or by a person who	or by a nondescript person who
dramatizes the issue	mumbles
in a manner not subject to	in a manner that brings joy to the
parody.	hearts of Art Buchwald and
	Gary Trudeau, who hope the
	speaker will seek the presidency.

The Reagan administration's use of the "Nation at Risk" PRolicy tour, presents a classic case of media manipulation for political gain. The administration faced scathing criticism regarding its full scale retreat in ensuring a modicum of educational equity in US

public schools (Lugg, 1996). It managed to cool much of the political heat by focusing its rhetoric (but not federal funds) in trumpeting educational "excellence," a symbol that appeared to be safely raceless, neutered and simple.[17] By the conclusion of 1984, discussions of educational equity and reform were not only past, they were passé.

Given the power of marketing and the frequency of election cycles, it is not surprising that "sound-bite" policy discussions dominate the educational policy discourse. Nevertheless, the boundaries remain in educational policy, and at all levels of governance. For those who wish to scale these walls, a better understanding of PRolicy may provide the guide wires to make the journey less hazardous.

[17]The present Clinton administration has also been aided by its remarkably sophisticated use of PRolicy (Drew, 1994), maintaining a federal presence in public education in the face of staunch Congressional (and ideological) opposition. It has managed to appease both the political left and right (to a certain extent -- of course, the far-right strenuously objects) by maintaining a focus on voluntary national "standards," a symbol that is as easily vacuous as "excellence."

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